

Household formation in the EU – Lone parents

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Statistics
in focus

POPULATION AND
SOCIAL CONDITIONS

THEME 3 – 5/2004

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This 'Statistics in Focus' is based on the 2001 wave of the European Community Household Panel Survey, and shows general demographic information about private households and persons in the European Union, household formation, as well as more detailed analysis concerning lone parents. Due to the greater sample size of the Labour Force Survey, this data source has been used for the demographic information. For any further breakdowns by households, the ECHP has been used due to its comparability across countries.

Around 156 million private households existed in the EU in 2001

In 2001, more than 375 million persons lived in around 156 million private households in the 15 Member States of the European Union. In the Union as a whole, the number of private households increased by over 3% between 1997 and 2001. This increase in the number of private households could be seen in all EU Member States. Spain, Ireland and Luxembourg recorded, at 8%, the largest increases in the number of private households.

The number of persons living in private households between 1997 and 2001 also increased for all EU Member States. Ireland reported again the largest increase at 6%. At EU15 level, the number of persons living in private households increased by 2% from 1997 to 2001.

The average household size in 2001 in the EU15 was 2.4 persons per household. This ranged however from 3.0 persons per household in Spain and Ireland, to 1.9 persons per household in Sweden.

Table 1: Number of private households, persons living in private households, and average household size in the EU Member States

	BE	DK	DE	EL	ES	FR	IE	IT	LU	NL	AT	PT	FI	SE	UK	EU15
Private households (in 000s)																
1997	4147	2407	36787	3875	12368	23728	1192	21451	159	6638	3174	3310	2326	4567	24700	150829
2001	4294	2456	37853	3993	13405	24477	1291	21968	172	6850	3298	3532	2382	4576	25973	156520
Persons living in private households (in 000s)																
1997	10041	5295	81214	10266	38953	57486	3605	57005	416	15317	7933	9935	5077	8641	58109	369293
2001	10308	5368	82200	10354	40163	57854	3839	57326	433	15821	8011	10295	5120	8663	61389	377144
Average household size																
2001	2.4	2.2	2.2	2.6	3.0	2.4	3.0	2.6	2.5	2.3	2.4	2.9	2.1	1.9	2.4	2.4

Source: European Union Labour Force Survey (DK, FI, SE: ECHP UDB, version December 2003)

When looking at the different household types and their distribution in the EU Member States, it could be seen that, as expected, the percentage of persons living alone in the Nordic countries in 2001 was significantly higher than in the Southern countries, with 42% in Sweden and 40% in Finland compared to 12% in Portugal and 17% in Spain. Correspondingly, the percentage of 'larger' households, such as households with 3 or more adults and dependent children, was higher in the Southern countries and Ireland; 17% in Portugal and Ireland, and 16% in Spain compared to 4% in Denmark and 3% in the Netherlands and Finland.



Table 2: Percentage of households by household type, 2001

	BE	DK	DE	EL	ES	FR	IE	IT	LU	NL	AT	PT	FI	SE ¹	UK	EU15
Single person household	25	26	39	19	17	25	24	21	27	35	33	12	40	42	31	29
2 adults without dependent children	30	38	24	26	24	29	16	22	30	32	22	22	25	28	32	26
Other households without dependent children	9	6	12	17	18	9	13	20	13	6	12	19	6	0	8	12
Lone parent households with 1 or more dependent children	3	2	2	2	1	3	3	1	1	3	3	2	2	7	5	3
2 adults with one dependent child	8	9	7	9	7	10	6	10	9	6	8	12	8	8	7	8
2 adults with 2 dependent children	13	11	8	15	12	14	11	11	9	11	10	12	9	11	9	10
2 adults with 3 or more dependent children	6	4	3	2	4	5	10	4	4	4	3	4	5	5	4	4
Other households with dependent children	5	4	6	8	16	5	17	10	6	3	10	17	3	0	5	7

Source: ECHP UDB, Eurostat, version December 2003

Lone parent households accounted for 3% of all private households in the EU in 2001

Lone parenthood can come about through the breakdown of a relationship, either married or unmarried, with dependent children, or the birth of a child or children outside a partnership. The occurrence of lone parenthood has increased considerably in the last 20-30 years, however to a different degree in the Member States. These differences are still visible when looking at the number and distribution of lone parents.

Here the focus is on 'single' lone parents, i.e. where one parent lives alone with his/her dependent child(ren). It therefore excludes lone parents that are still living with their own parents, or who have since remarried or are cohabitating.

In 2001, there were 4.3 million lone parent households in the Union as a whole. Lone parent households made up 3% of all private households in the EU15 in 2001, ranging from 5% in the United Kingdom, to around 1% in Spain, Italy and Luxembourg.

In 2001, lone parent households accounted for 9% of all households with dependent children in the EU15. This percentage ranged from 22% in Sweden and 17% in the United Kingdom to 4% in Italy, Portugal and Greece, and 3% in Spain.

Table 3: Lone parent households, 2001

	BE	DK	DE	EL	ES	FR	IE	IT	LU	NL	AT	PT	FI	SE	UK	EU15
Total number (in 000s)	136	43	766	62	182	845	43	311	2	202	91	65	59	303	1229	4338
As percentage of all households	3	2	2	2	1	3	3	1	1	3	3	2	2	7	5	3
As percentage of all households with dependent children	9	6	8	4	3	9	7	4	5	11	8	4	9	22	17	9

Source: ECHP UDB, Eurostat, version December 2003

When looking at lone parents by sex, as might be expected, over 90% of all lone parents in the EU15 in 2001 were women. The situation in the majority of the Member States showed a similar female-male-ratio, with the exception of Sweden, where 26% of the lone parents were men. The age distribution of lone parents was also as expected: 86% of the lone parents in the EU15 were between 25 and 49 years old. This distribution was relatively homogeneous in the Member States. However, Ireland showed a higher number of lone parents in the age group 16-24 years: 11% in Ireland compared to an average of 2% in the other Member States, while in Greece and Portugal more lone parents belonged to the age group 50-65 years; 23% and 22% respectively compared to an average of 11%.

For the Union as a whole, nearly 60% of the lone parents in 2001 lived with one dependent child, about a third with two dependent children, and just over 10% of the lone parents had 3 or more dependent children. The situation in the Member States was not consistent, with Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Finland and Sweden showing similar ratios to the ones in the EU15, some other Member States showing more lone parent households with 1 dependent child (i.e. Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and Austria), and the third group showing more lone parent families with either 2 dependent children, or 3 or more dependent children. In Portugal, the United Kingdom and Spain, 22%, 18% and 17% respectively of lone parents had 3 or more dependent children.

¹ The Swedish subsample of the ECHP UDB defines households as people being taxed together.

Table 4: 'Single' lone parents by age and sex and number of children, 2001

	BE	DK	DE	EL	ES	FR	IE	IT	LU	NL	AT	PT	FI	SE	UK	EU15
'Single' lone parents by sex (%)																
Male	7	12	4	9	12	12	1*	14	5*	12	5	14	14	26	7	9
Female	93	88	96	91	88	88	99*	86	95*	88	95	86	86	74	93	91
'Single' lone parents by age (%)																
16-24 years	1	2	5	0	0	2	11*	0	0*	1	3	0	5	4	6	3
25-49 years	95	89	89	73	91	81	79*	85	88*	90	87	71	77	82	86	86
50-64 years	4	9	5	23	9	16	9*	15	12*	8	8	22	18	14	8	11
65 years and over	0	1	1	3	0	1	2*	0	0*	1	2	7	0	0	1	1
'Single' lone parents by number of children (%)																
1 child	53	57	71	50	52	60	55*	64	68*	41	66	55	56	56	44	58
2 children	34	38	24	42	31	30	35*	28	31*	45	29	23	31	33	39	31
3+ children	13	5	4	8	17	10	11*	8	1*	14	5	22	12	11	18	11

Source: ECHP UDB, Eurostat, version December 2003

Comparing the activity status of lone parents with the total population

Due to the limited sample size and to simplify the comparability of the data regarding activity status, part-time / full-time employment, and satisfaction with main activity, only the age group to which the majority of the lone parents belonged to (25-49 years) was used for analysis. This is the case for all of the following analyses concerning lone parents, as well as the comparative group of 'all persons'.

Having a job

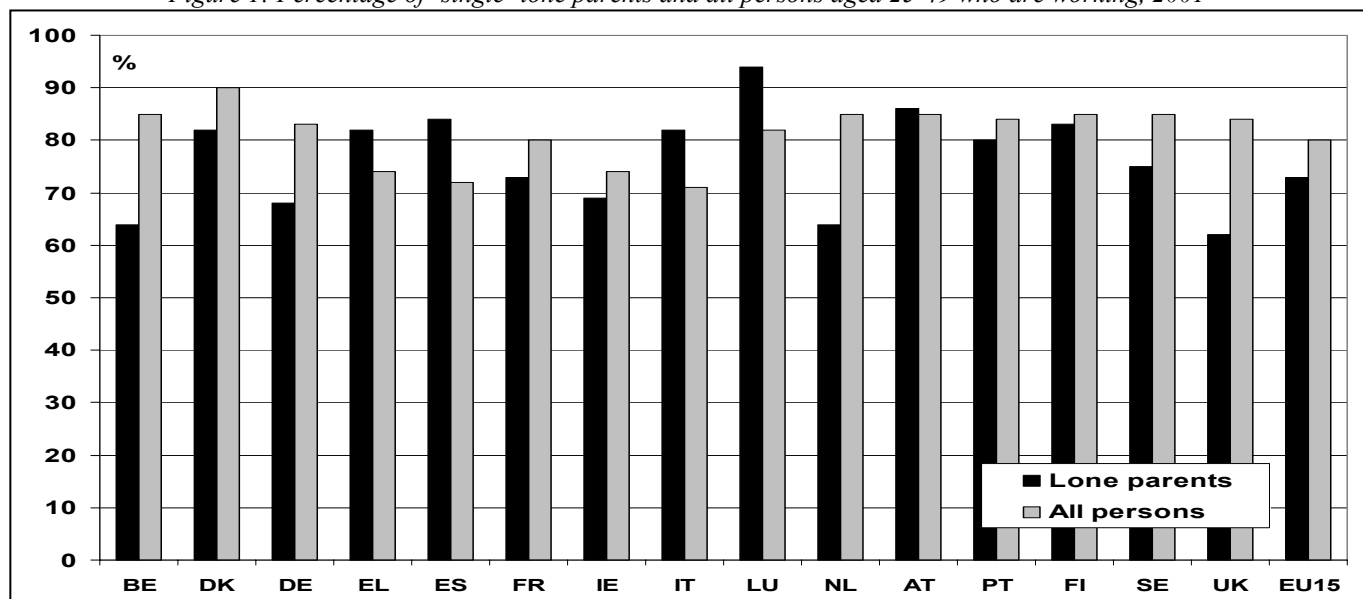
In the EU15 in 2001, just over 70% of lone parents were 'working'. 'Working' was defined as normally working at least 1 hour a week, whereas 'not working' included unemployed, discouraged workers or economically inactive. This percentage of 'working' lone parents ranged from 94% in Luxembourg and 86% in Austria, to 62% in the UK, and 64% in Belgium and the Netherlands. Differences between countries may be due to various reasons, such as the level of child-care provision, the degree of support available from within an extended family, the availability of part-time work, and the extent of taxation and welfare support, etc.

Looking at the activity status of lone parents by sex, 71% of all female lone parents aged 25-49 stated that they were 'working', compared to 95% of male lone parents. As can be expected due to the sex distribution of lone parents, there was hardly any difference in the distribution across the Member States, between the percentages of all 'working' lone parents or female lone parents in this age-group.

A comparison of all lone parents aged 25-49 with all persons in that age-group shows that 73% of all lone parents were 'working' compared to 80% of all persons aged 25-49. In the majority of the Member States lone parents were less likely to work than all persons in this age-group, with the exception of Greece, Spain, Italy, Luxembourg, and Austria.

The percentage of all persons aged 25-49 'working' ranged from 90% in Denmark, to 72% in Spain and 71% in Italy. Broken down by sex, 70% of women were 'working' in the EU, compared to 89% of men. The Nordic countries showed a relatively high number of women 'working' in this age-group (ranging from 86% in Denmark to 79% in Finland) compared to 56% in Italy and 58% in Greece.

Figure 1: Percentage of 'single' lone parents and all persons aged 25-49 who are working, 2001



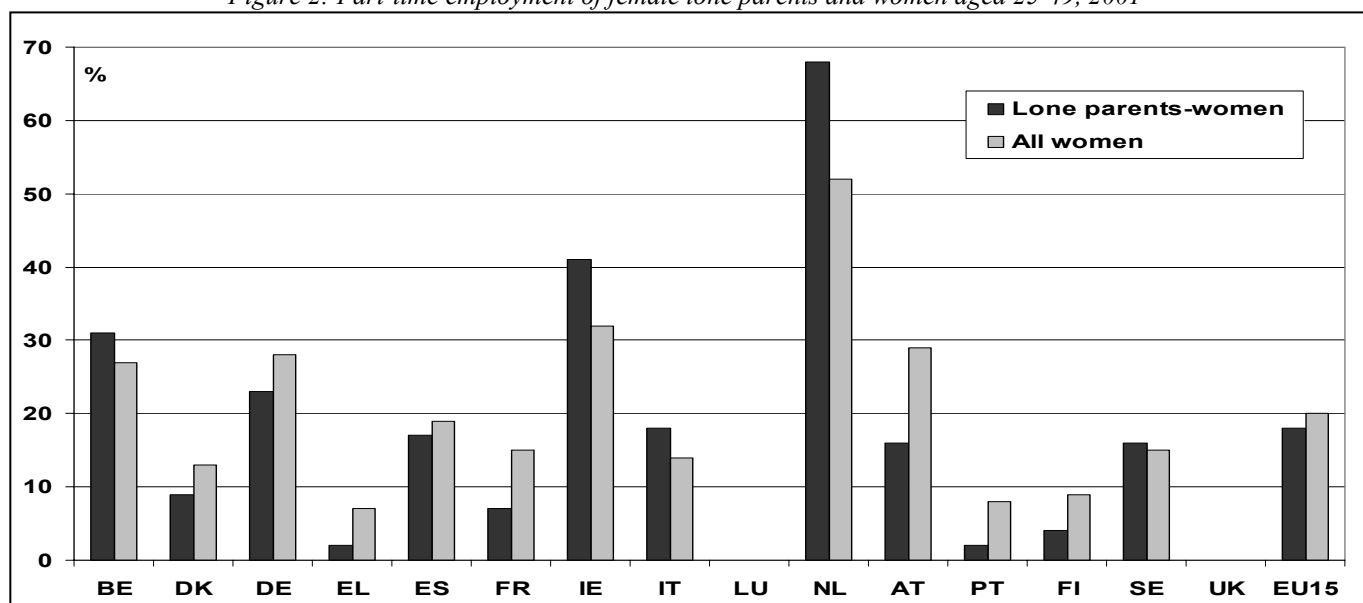
Source: ECHP UDB, Eurostat, version December 2003

Part-time or full-time employment?

In the Union as a whole in 2001, 83% of all lone parents whose activity status was 'working' (i.e. working at least 1 hour per week), reported that their main activity was a full-time activity. This ranged from 98% in Portugal to 41% in the Netherlands. A very high percentage of reported full-time activity amongst lone parents could be seen in Denmark, Greece, France, Finland and Portugal. As mentioned before, due to the fact that most lone parents are female, there was hardly any difference in the percentages or the country patterns between all lone parents and female lone parents in this age-group.

However, when comparing this distribution with that of all persons aged 25-49, it could be seen that more working persons, 90%, reported their main activity to be full-time in the EU15 in 2001. The distribution for all women, as for the lone parents in this age-group, showed that the Netherlands was the only Member State with a part-time rate of over 50%, compared to 7% of part-time workers amongst women in Greece and 8% in Portugal.

Figure 2: Part-time employment of female lone parents and women aged 25-49, 2001



Source: ECHP UDB, Eurostat, version December 2003

How people see their main activity

In the Union as a whole in 2001, 63% of all lone parents stated that their 'self-defined' main activity status was 'working with an employer'. Just 8% of lone parents described their main activity status as 'self-employed', 10% stated that they were unemployed, and 14% were 'doing housework and /or looking after children or other persons'.

In all of the Member States, more than half of the lone parents stated that their self-defined main activity status was 'working with an employer'. In fact, at least $\frac{2}{3}$ of lone parents working with an employer were reported in Denmark, Spain, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Austria,

Portugal, and Finland. The distribution ranged from 80% in Denmark and Finland, to 54% in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The lower rate of employment for lone parents in the United Kingdom was mainly due to a relatively high percentage of lone parents 'doing housework and/or looking after children or other persons' (i.e. 27%), while in Germany the reasons 'unemployed' and 'doing housework and/or looking after children or other persons' accounted for 7% and 19% respectively. In Belgium and the Netherlands, more lone parents reported their main activity status as 'unemployed' (21% and 24% respectively) than in the other Member States.

Table 5: Main activity status of 'single' lone parents aged 25-49, 2001 (in %)

	BE	DK	DE	EL	ES	FR	IE	IT	LU	NL	AT	PT	FI	SE	UK	EU15
Working with an employer	56	80	57	65*	75	71	66*	59	94*	54	76	66	80	:	54	63
Self-employed	6	2	5	17*	9	3	2*	19	0*	4	9	12	2	:	4	8
Unemployed	21	6	7	13*	9	17	11*	6	0*	24	6	20	15	:	5	10
Doing housework, looking after children or other persons	4	0	19	5*	3	8	21*	12	3*	15	7	2	0	:	27	14
Other	13	12	12	0*	3	1	0*	4	3*	3	3	0	3	:	9	6

Source: ECHP UDB, Eurostat, version December 2003

Amongst all persons aged 25-49, 67% described their main activity status as 'working with an employer', compared to 63% of lone parents. However, the difference was more visible when comparing female lone parents with all women aged 25-49. Although the overall number that was 'working with an employer' was nearly identical between the two groups in the Union as a whole, it was very apparent that all women aged 25-

49 were more likely to 'do housework and/or look after children or other persons' (21% compared to 15%) and less likely to be unemployed (7% compared to 10%) than female lone parents in this age group. This was especially the case in Greece, Italy and Ireland, where about a third of all women in this age group reported that their main activity was 'doing housework'.

Table 6: Main activity status of female lone parents and all women aged 25-49, 2001

	BE	DK	DE	EL	ES	FR	IE	IT	LU	NL	AT	PT	FI	SE	UK	EU15
Female lone parents aged 25-49 (%)																
Working with an employer	53	78	56	62*	74*	71	66*	59	94*	50	75	67	78	:	53	62
Self-employed	6	2	4	18*	8*	2	2*	17	0*	3	9	10	2	:	5	7
Unemployed	23	7	6	14*	11*	17	11*	6	0*	26	6	21	17	:	5	10
Doing housework, looking after children or other persons	5	0	20	6*	4*	9	21*	14	3*	18	7	2	0	:	29	15
Other	14	12	13	0*	3*	1	0*	4	3*	3	3	0	3	:	8	6
All women aged 25-49 (%)																
Working with an employer	69	80	62	42	49	69	56	46	67	62	65	62	72	:	67	60
Self-employed	6	4	5	10	7	3	2	8	3	4	7	12	6	:	5	6
Unemployed	8	4	6	7	9	9	3	8	1	11	3	6	6	:	2	7
Doing housework, looking after children or other persons	14	1	19	33	28	17	32	31	26	21	19	11	9	:	16	21
Other	3	11	9	8	7	2	6	7	3	3	5	9	8	:	10	7

Source: ECHP UDB, Eurostat, version December 2003

Satisfied with main activity?

When asked about their satisfaction with their main activity, nearly 70% of lone parents in 2001 in the EU15 reported that they were satisfied with their main activity. The Southern Member States showed lower rates of satisfaction than the rest of the Member States with 54% in Greece and less than 50% in Portugal. The most satisfied were the 'single' lone parents in Austria with 92%, and in Denmark and Finland with 83%.

In the Union as a whole, 75% of all persons aged 25-49 stated that they were satisfied with their main activity.

For the majority of the Member States the rate of satisfaction for all persons was higher than that for lone parents, with the exception of Belgium. When comparing the Member States, it could be seen that, as for the lone parents, the Southern countries showed lower rates of satisfaction than the rest of the Member States, i.e. 59% of persons in Italy and 56% in Greece reported to be satisfied with their main activity compared to 90% in the Netherlands and 92% Austria.

Table 7: Satisfaction with main activity for 'single' lone parents and all persons aged 25-49, 2001

	BE	DK	DE	EL	ES	FR	IE	IT	LU	NL	AT	PT	FI	SE	UK	EU15
'Single' lone parents (%)																
Not satisfied	18	17	:	46*	42	30	26*	42	:	21	8	52	17	:	:	32
Satisfied	82	83	:	54*	58	70	74*	58	:	79	92	48	83	:	:	68
All persons aged 25-49 (%)																
Not satisfied	22	11	:	44	32	17	21*	41	:	10	8	27	13	:	:	25
Satisfied	78	89	:	56	68	83	79*	59	:	90	92	73	87	:	:	75

Source: ECHP UDB, Eurostat, version December 2003

Lone parents - longitudinal analysis

When analysing the situation of lone parents over several consecutive years, the following issue has to be taken into account. As mentioned at the beginning of this statistics in focus, lone parenthood can come about through the breakdown of a relationship, either married or unmarried, with dependent children, or the birth of a child or children outside a partnership. This means that when analysing the occurrence of lone parenthood over several consecutive year, the event 'birth of a child', is a non-reversible occurrence, which could happen at any

point in the time period in question. This is of course not the same for 'breakdown of a relationship with dependent children', which can be reversible.

Due to the smaller sample size for the longitudinal analysis, the group 'lone parents' include 'single' lone parents, as well as those living with other persons (i.e. not a husband or partner), for example with their own parents.

Lone parents in current year, breakdown by situation in the year before

When examining the situation of lone parents in 2001, compared with their situation in the year before, it can be seen that in all Member States, with the exception of Spain, over 80% of lone parents in 2001 had also been lone parents in the year before. Ireland showed the

highest percentage of lone parents in 2001 that were also lone parents in 2000: 96%. In the EU15, 13% of lone parents in 2001 stated that they lived in a relationship with dependent children in the year before. This ranged from 2% in Ireland to 22% in Spain.

Table 8: Lone parents in current year (2001), breakdown by situation in the year before

	BE	DK	DE	EL	ES	FR	IE	IT	LU	NL	AT	PT	FI	SE	UK	EU15
Couple with child	18	13	9	18	22	12	2*	13	5*	5	9	10	11	:	14	13
Couple without child	0	0	0	0	0	0	1*	0	3*	0	0	3	0	:	0	0
Single	1	1	6	0	7	1	1*	1	1*	2	2	1	3	:	1	3
Lone parent	81	86	85	82	71	87	96*	86	91*	93	89	86	85	:	85	84

Source: ECHP UDB, Eurostat, version December 2003

➤ ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

ECHP:

The European Community Household Panel (ECHP) forms the most closely co-ordinated component of the European system of social surveys. It provides comparable social statistics across Member States on family and household types, income, employment, as well as various other social indicators concerning living conditions of private households and persons. The total duration of the ECHP was 8 years, running from 1994 to 2001. In the first wave, in 1994, a sample of some 60,500 nationally represented households - approximately 130,000 adults aged 16 years and over - were interviewed in the then 12 Member States. Austria (1995) and Finland (1996) have joined the project since then. Data for Sweden is available as of 1997, and has been derived from the Swedish Living Conditions Survey and transformed into ECHP format.

Private households:

At community level a household is defined in terms of shared residence and common arrangements, as comprising either of one person living alone or a group of persons, not necessarily related, living at the same address with common house-keeping, i.e. sharing a meal on most days or sharing a living or sitting room. Not all countries adhere strictly to that definition, e.g. for the Swedish subsample of the ECHP UDB a household is composed of the interviewee aged 16-84 years (persons aged 85+ are not included in the Swedish Living Conditions Survey), the spouse/cohabitants and children up to age 20. Children aged 20 years or more, as well as individuals sharing the dwelling place are defined as a separate household. Also, cohabitants who do not have children in common with the interviewed person are not considered to be part of the same household.

Lone parents:

Lone parents are those who live alone with their dependent children. Dependent children are considered to be either aged under 16, or 16-24 and living in a household of which at least one of their parents is a member and who are economically inactive (e.g. in education or training).

Self-defined main activity status:

- *'Working with an employer'* includes 'working with an employer in paid employment', 'working with an employer in paid apprenticeship', 'working with an employer in training under special schemes related to employment'.
- *'Self-employment'*
- *'Unemployed'*
- *'Retired'*
- *'Doing housework, looking after children or other persons'*
- *'Other'* includes 'unpaid work in family enterprise', 'in education or training', 'in community or military service' and 'other economically inactive'

Satisfaction with main activity:

There is no data available for 'satisfaction with main activity' for Germany, Luxembourg, UK and Sweden.

Reliability / threshold rules:

: no information available or less than 20 observations or more than 20% of missing information

* low reliability = 20-49 observations or 10-20% of missing observations

Further information:

➤ Databases

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